

Thank you for that introduction and for inviting me to be here with you all today!

This is a historic time to be here in DC. I can honestly say that no one knows what's going on here in Washington. I say that in sincerity. And I say that in sadness. We have to get this issue resolved, because it affects all of us.

I am so pleased I have had the opportunity to work together with all of you – it is an honor. While I'm here with you today, I want to give you a brief update about what's happening here in Washington, and then I'll open it up for a few minutes of questions. This week, the House is debating the Fiscal Year 2012 Interior - Environment Appropriations bill. On the Interior Appropriations subcommittee, of which I am a member, there is real bipartisan support for protecting funds for Native Americans within this bill.

Chairman Mike Simpson, Ranking Member Jim Moran, and Congressman Tom Cole have all shown that they will advocate for Indian Country. In this bill, Chairman Simpson and Rep. Cole worked together with Democrats to protect critical education and health care investments in Indian Country as part of our trust relationship with you. We worked together to protect the gains that Native American accounts have received over the years and under President Obama. IHS receives a much-needed increase, and Native American children, families and elders will all benefit as a result.

As an aside, when we held the public hearing, your tribes and tribal members were outstanding. You came together with your many stories and voices, and provided one unified voice. It was powerful. When Congress works together with you and your Nations, we can help improve the lives of future generations.

However, on virtually every other aspect of this bill, particularly on the environment, this Interior appropriations bill is a radical attempt to take America backwards from 40 years of bipartisan progress on protecting human health and our environment – risking the health of ALL Americans. You know better than most that we have to consider our future generations when we make policy and funding decisions on our air and water.

Despite the necessary investments in Indian Country, this legislation contained far too many environmental policies that put us all at risk, which is why I could not vote for the legislation as it stands. Hopefully the final version of the FY2012 Interior Appropriations that is signed into law protects our environment and Indian Country.

You know I support increased funding in Indian Country. The federal government needs to live up to its commitments – it MUST live up to its commitments to provide health and education to tribal members. And when a tribe provides those benefits to its members – because the federal government has not – those benefits should not be taxed. We have to be vigilant about that – that the federal government should not be taxing health benefits that we were supposed to provide to tribal members in the first place. We were successful in including that clarification in the health reform bill. And that's something else we have to be vigilant about. When Members talk about repealing the *Affordable Care Act*, that includes the permanent reauthorization of the *Indian Health Care Improvement Act*

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When you talk to Members, you have to tell them that it cannot be part of repeal. IHCA was 1/3 of the *Affordable Care Act*. Even if you don't agree with the other 2/3, we have to keep that permanent reauthorization. And if you are talking to new Members, remember that they were not here to vote on the bill, and they may not know that it was included.

Lastly, before I take questions, I want you to know that we're still fighting to resolve the Carcieri issue, so there is no uncertainty about taking land into trust for tribes. Once again I am co-sponsor of legislation offered by my colleague Rep. Dale Kildee – the "Carcieri fix." This bill clarifies that Congress did not intend for there to be two classes of tribes. I am hopeful we will get this legislation passed and signed into law.

As you know, Dale Kildee has announced that he will not be running for re-election. Dale Kildee has been a true leader on Native American issues and a wonderful colleague to serve with.

Thank you again for having me here today, and for all that you do for your members and the surrounding communities with your successes in gaming. Thank you for your trust in me, and for educating me. I look forward to continuing to work together with you, and I welcome your questions.